



News Release

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Educators Get Schooled in Student Injuries

(Salt Lake City, UT) – New Utah Department of Health (UDOH) figures show thousands of children are getting hurt at school every year, and that most of the injuries could have been prevented. The UDOH has compiled five years of school injury data into a series of fact sheets, the first of which was recently delivered to education officials.

For the years 1997-2002, UDOH received nearly 33,000 reports of injuries serious enough to require medical attention or to force students to miss at least a half-day of school. Among the Department's findings:

- **Every hour** a student is injured at school.
- **Every 4 hours** a student sustains a fracture or possible fracture at school.
- **Every day** a student suffers a possible concussion at school.
- **Every 5 days** a student is hospitalized because of a school injury.

Among students in kindergarten through 6th grade, injuries occur most often on the playground or playfield; in grades 7-12, gyms and athletic fields are the most dangerous areas for students. In all grades, boys are hurt more often (60%) than girls (40%).

“As we analyze the data, it’s clear the majority of school injuries don’t have to happen,” said Trisha Keller, Program Manager of Violence and Injury Prevention, UDOH. “Younger children get hurt because they play rough and use equipment incorrectly,” she said. “In the upper grades, student athletes suffer injuries because they aren’t properly conditioned, don’t warm up before playing or practicing, or overexert themselves.”

Classroom injuries are also a big problem in secondary schools. “Students can be injured anywhere,” said Utah’s Director of Risk Management Alan Edwards, “From home economics

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class to the chemistry lab and wood shop. We get a lot of reports of young people losing fingers while using saws and other power tools – most often because they simply aren't being careful."

The news about school safety isn't all bad, according to Edwards. "Utah schools are far safer than they were just five years ago," Edwards says. "Districts are purchasing safer playground equipment, using shock-absorbing fill under swings and slides, and have all adopted zero-tolerance policies on fighting."

Parents can play a big role in improving school safety. "Parents need to teach children of all ages to respect authority and their peers, and that bullying is hurtful and dangerous," says Keller.

"Students in the upper grades can avoid a lot of sports injuries simply by being properly conditioned," Keller added. "And they should never play injured, no matter what the coach or their friends say," she added. "One football game is not worth a broken neck or other injury that could leave a child with a life-long disability."

Utah schools use a standardized form to document incidents that require treatment by a medical professional and/or cause a student to miss at least a half-day of school. This Student Injury Reporting System (SIRS) is administered by the UDOH and has data on more than 113,000 injuries dating back to 1994.

"The UDOH injury report form is a great tool for schools to track injuries," said Edwards. "If filled out correctly, they provide a very accurate description of the injury and can offer districts some protection from liability," he said. "Risk Management supports the UDOH reporting program and we encourage schools to use the forms for all reportable injuries."

For more information on student injuries, or copies of the first fact sheet, call (801) 538-6348.

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The mission of the Utah Department of Health is to protect the public's health through preventing avoidable illness, injury, disability and premature death, assuring access to affordable, quality health care, and promoting healthy lifestyles.